

NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS INQUIRY INTO INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION IN
COASTAL GROWTH AREAS

Page: 15171

Mr ROBERT OAKESHOTT (Port Macquarie) [6.07 p.m.]: I support and endorse the inquiry into infrastructure provision in coastal growth areas that is being undertaken by the Standing Committee on Public Works. I do so in an effort to encourage people in the Port Macquarie electorate and surrounding communities along the North Coast to make themselves aware of this important inquiry and become involved in it. I urge Ministers in this place to encourage government agencies on the North Coast to provide frank, honest and open submissions to the inquiry. I note that one committee member, the Independent member for Tamworth, is in the Chamber. I know he is keen to get stuck into the inquiry. The Standing Committee on Public Works is inquiring into and reporting on issues relating to the provision of infrastructure to coastal growth areas in New South Wales.

The inquiry will examine key coastal population growth and urban consolidation trends in New South Wales; the short-term and long-term needs of coastal communities for basic infrastructure and human services infrastructure; the co-ordination of Commonwealth, State and local government strategies to deliver sustainable coastal growth and supporting infrastructure; best practice methods to plan, manage and provide infrastructure to coastal growth areas; and the management of social, environmental and economic considerations associated with infrastructure provision in coastal growth areas. Those are key issues. In many ways, this is an inquiry into the longer-term challenges and battles faced by members of Parliament on the North Coast as we try to get the Government to recognise the population growth on the North Coast and to keep bureaucracy and governments at least up to speed with that population growth.

Unfortunately, the Government has failed so many times and in so many areas. I shall give three examples of how the Government is failing to deliver services to the North Coast. The first is the manipulation of funding formulas. For a long time now North Coast members have been calling for nothing more than equity of funding in all government departments. The Department of Health is a good example. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal has recommended equity of funding for the North Coast, yet we continue to have an inequitable distribution of resources under the distribution formula. I understand that at the moment it is between 5 per cent and 9 per cent, which equates to about \$20 million that could be spent on a range of services for the North Coast. So per head of population our area is missing out on its fair share of the pie. I think that is common across many departments in terms of delivery of services.

The second is the manipulation of the various benchmarks used when considering new infrastructure provision. I have a good example in my electorate of Port Macquarie, where one high-growth area needs a new primary school. The Department of Education and Training uses a benchmark of 400 students for the provision of a new school. Currently about 300 students get on a bus from a particular area every day. Yet, in comparison, more than 75 per cent of primary schools throughout New South Wales have fewer than 200 students. Once again we are arguing the case for equity, but we have a Government that will not make the hard decision to close some schools—and I acknowledge that it is a hard decision—to provide equity in high-growth areas, such as the Port Macquarie electorate. So we suffer. In anyone's language, that is inequitable because the Government is not willing to make those decisions.

The third is the manipulation of agency responsibilities and the demarcation disputes between agencies. The current issues surround the reform of the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, and the lack of resources to provide services is a good example. Respite services are not being provided to the extent that they should be; therefore, families are starting to consider abandonment, which then becomes an issue for the Department of Community Services. It is government by cure, not government by prevention. It is a good example of where the Government is not delivering. If some longer-term programs were put in place, we would all benefit. [*Time expired* .]

NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard, 6 April 2005, Pages 70 - (article 40)